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INSIDE REPORT:

Much Ado on Foreign Aid

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WASHINGTON.

After much ado but little action, President Johnson's foreign aid committee—featuring Ball, Bell, Bundy, Black, Bullitt and Co.—is about ready to disband.

It was a noble idea, this committee to study foreign aid. But it never had a chance. It never even had a name.

In the first place, President Kennedy tried the "Let's appoint a committee" approach to get foreign aid off the Congressional shoals more than a year ago. Instead of helping, this committee, headed by Lucius Clay, inadvertently shot more holes in the leaky vessel. The experience was sobering.

In the second place, Congressional disagreements over how to package foreign aid for easy handling on Capitol Hill seem irreconcilable.

Sen. J. W. Fulbright, of Arkansas, a Johnson confidant and chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, has been vainly arguing in favor of dismantling various component parts of the aid bill and distributing them throughout the government (and in different committees of Congress). For example, he wants all military aid split out of the bill—and out of the Agency for International Development (AID)—and turned over to the Pentagon.

President Johnson leans toward this approach himself. But Rep. Thomas Morgan of Pennsylvania, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, has written a personal letter to Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara sternly opposing the move.

Even if Morgan and Fulbright agreed, however, they could not persuade two of the trustees of Congress: Sen. Richard B. Russell and Rep. Carl Vinson, the prestigious Georgians who head the Senate and House Armed Services Committees.

If the military portion of the bill were sliced away, it would have to be handled by these two committees. Vinson has said he would whip through a resolution referring it right back to Morgan's Foreign Affairs Committee.

And Morgan insists that if Fulbright's plan were adopted, the Administration would lose a dozen or so House committee votes for the foreign aid authorization bill this spring. Military aid, Morgan claims, is the sweetener needed to move the unpopular aid bill through his committee each year.

President Johnson's foreign aid panel, which taxied down the runway with characteristic flourish on Dec. 26, never really got off the ground. One of its members, for example, is Sargent Shriver, the head of the Peace Corps. But the President sent Shriver on a global tour soon after the panel had its second meeting.

Shriver was put on the committee in hopes that if the aid program could be dismembered and parceled out among different agencies, technical assistance could be tucked into the Peace Corps.

This was not the brightest of hopes. Shriver is as eager to take over foreign aid as he is to catch leprosy.

The story of the President's committee does not stop there. Newspapers soon carried leaked stories that Under Secretary of State George Ball, the chairman, was to move the aid agency lock, stock and barrel into the State Department.

These reports, with all the other rumors, hardly raised spirits in AID. The agency's morale, which is never more than barely visible, disappeared altogether.

Now, however, it is very unlikely that much will be changed. The appropriation for a few components of military aid, such as money for training foreign troops and the regular allocation to NATO, may be transferred to the defense budget. AID would be delighted.

And then the President's committee, which was supposed to make its report by Jan. 15, will pass into limbo in the footsteps of the Clay committee and countless forgotten study-committees.

When that happens, Assistant Secretary of Defense William P. Bundy, Assistant Secretary of the Treasury John Bullitt, and former World Bank president Eugene Black, along with the other members, can forget about reorganizing foreign aid—until next year.

And Bell can get back to full-time work at AID, where his plans to focus foreign aid on fewer countries, cut employees and get results have been temporarily sidetracked.

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